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ABSTRACT

Information on 44 small/rural K-12 Nebraska school districts (900 students or fewer) is compared to data from 642 similar districts nationwide, using material gathered during 1982-83. Of the nation's 15,601 public school districts, 4,125 (26.4%) were identified as qualifying for the survey; 76.4% (249 districts, enrolling 76,516 students) of Nebraska's 334 districts qualified. A questionnaire mailed to superintendents of 50 randomly-selected Nebraska districts and 816 randomly-selected districts nationwide achieved respective response rates of 88% and 78.7%. A 3-page table compares Nebraska and national data in sections on the district, superintendent, teachers, student performance, and school programs. For example, student performance is compared in terms of mean numbers of graduating seniors (Nebraska: 29, national: 34.5); percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam finalists (0.7%, 1%); percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on the American College Test (10%, 7.5%); percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (1.8%, 2.6%); percent of graduating seniors going on to college (40.6%, 38.6%); and percent of graduating seniors going to technical school (22.8%, 14.1%). (MH)

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A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEBRASKA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Nebraska State Department of Education
November 17, 1983

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NEBRASKA

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Nebraska enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Forty-four districts were surveyed in Nebraska; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEBRASKA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Nebraska with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Nebraska, 249 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 76.4 percent of the state's 334

non-county administered public school districts and enrolled 76,516 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 50 districts in Nebraska, of which 44 responded (88.0 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Nebraska with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

Nebraska is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Nebraska educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEBRASKA AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Nebraska	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	285	436
2. Average number of schools per district	1.6	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	143.8	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	162	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	45.3	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	15.8	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	11.6	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$630,794	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	92.9	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	40.9	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	44.3	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	9.1	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	79.5	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	11.4	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	6.8	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	25.0	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	81.8	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	18.2	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	22.7	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	9.5	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	14.7	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:11.8	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83)	8.9	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$11,948	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$20,472	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83)	$16,129	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Nebraska	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	11.4	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers	3.6	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	29.0	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	0.7	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	10.0	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	1.8	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	40.6	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	22.8	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	95.5	86.6
School Counselor	97.7	79.4
School Psychologist	36.4	33.8
School Nurse	47.7	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	95.5	80.9
Adult Education Director	11.4	22.0
Community Education Director	6.8	7.8
Vocational Education Director	11.4	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	100	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	100	55.4
Softball	4.6	37.1
Volleyball	100	65.7
Cross Country Track	18.6	23.3
Soccer	0	7.0
Wrestling	37.2	25.2
Track and Field	100	78.7
Golf	25.6	22.4
Tennis	2.3	16.3
Swimming	0	3.2
Gymnastics	0	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Nebraska	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	27.9	41.8
German	7.0	9.7
French	11.6	18.9
Calculus	34.9	35.9
Chemistry	88.4	79.4
Computer Science	69.8	60.3
Electronics	18.6	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	41.9	63.1
Physics	83.7	67.7

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